

**General Assembly**

Distr.: General
17 December 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session

Agenda item 110 (b)

Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Letter dated 15 December 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

With regard to your note transmitting the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the question of religious intolerance, dated 24 August 1998 (A/53/279), in particular to its paragraph 71 which refers to the alleged cases in Turkey, I should like to bring the following to your attention:

Recognized as a Turkish institution by all the participant States during the Lausanne Treaty negotiations in 1923, Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul offers religious services to the Greek Orthodox minority of Istanbul without any hindrance.

Turkey is proud of its record of tolerance towards all religions. Today, all religious institutions in Turkey enjoy their freedom guaranteed by the Turkish Constitution without any discrimination and provide unobstructed services to their respective communities. In the course of the last few years, two regrettable but isolated incidents against Greek Orthodox Churches took place. It has been clear that those incidents were neither politically motivated nor had any anti-religious bias, but were purely of a criminal nature. Such criminal acts cannot be condoned. The Turkish Government strongly deplores such incidents and is determined to bring the perpetrators to justice. These deplorable incidents have been thoroughly investigated and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the question of religious intolerance has duly been informed of the inquiry. It would be a gross error to interpret such isolated incidents as a restriction of the activities of the Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 110 (b).

(Signed) Volkan Vural
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

